

THE
BROTHERHOOD OF
IN ITS RELATION TO THE
ATONEMENT OF

BY

REV. J. M. PENDLETON



PHILADELPHIA:
THE AMERICAN BAPTIST PUBLICATIONS
1420 CHESTNUT STREET

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PENDLETON, D.D.



PHILADELPHIA:

BAPTIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY,

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THE

FATHERHOOD OF GOD

IN ITS RELATION TO THE

ATONEMENT OF CHRIST.

BY

James Madison
REV. J. M. PENDLETON, D.D.

1811-1891.



PHILADELPHIA:

THE AMERICAN-BAPTIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY,

1420 CHESTNUT STREET.

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THE PHILADELPHIA ASSOCIATION

OCTOBER 5TH, 1876.

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THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD

IN ITS RELATION TO

THE ATONEMENT OF CHRIST.

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.—Gal. 4: 4—6.

THESE are wonderful words, for they convey to our minds wonderful ideas. We are told that God sent forth his Son, and sent him when the fulness of the time had come—when the fact had been fully demonstrated that “the world by wisdom knew not God,” and the Mosaic economy had shown the insufficiency of

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its sacrifices "to take away sins." The Son of God sent forth was made, or rather, born of a woman, thus allying himself to humanity, and becoming the Son of man. As he was born of a woman so he was born under the law, and as he was not man till he became incarnate, he was above the law until his incarnation placed him under it. There was a purpose in all this; namely, the redemption of those under the law, and in the execution of this purpose is embraced "the adoption of sons." Because of this adoption, God, who sent his Son, sends the Spirit of his Son into the hearts of the adopted, and this Spirit prompts them to claim filial relationship with God. The Spirit in them cries, "Abba, Father."

This is a cursory view of the text, nor shall I stop to inquire whether the text legitimately supplies the theme now to be discussed, by appointment of this Association at its last meeting. I only say that I know of no other text from which the theme can be more appropriately deduced. The Association is responsible for the subject, and, alas for me, I shall be responsible for its inadequate discussion. The topic is,

“THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD IN RELATION TO
THE ATONEMENT OF CHRIST.”

The matter which first claims our attention is,

I. THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD. On this point there are two leading views, which must be referred to if we would understand the subject. According to one of these views, God is the universal Father, the Father of all men. Being the Creator of all, he is supposed to love all, and regard all as his children. If all are his children, all can claim him as Father, and say, “Our Father who art in heaven.” This was the view of the late F. W. Robertson, of Brighton, England. Hence in one of his Sermons on Baptism he says, “Christ came to reveal a name—the Father. He abolished the exclusive ‘my,’ and he taught us to pray ‘our Father.’ He proclaimed God the Father—man the Son; revealed that the Son of man is also the Son of God. Man, as man, God’s child.” In one of his Letters, No. 76, Mr. Robertson says, “I accept gladly the expression of the Catechism, ‘my baptism,’ wherein I was made a child of God, &c.—*made*, as the queen is made queen

by her coronation. She was queen before ; nay, if she had not been queen, coronation could not make her queen ; it could not make Lady Jane Grey queen. Baptism could not make me a child of God, unless I were one by reason of my humanity already." In Letter, No. 116, he writes, " Christ revealed the fact that all men are God's children."

I have made these quotations from Robertson, that you may see what a man of varied talents and a writer of fascinating vivacity, believed on the matter before us. That he was deplorably wrong I expect to show after a while. The doctrine of God's universal Fatherhood gives rise to various forms of theological error. I can only name some of these forms : You will find men in England and in this country, whose attention is so fixed on the *paternal* character of God, that they seem to ignore his *rectoral* character altogether. They therefore deny the doctrine of Atonement ; for they say, no atonement was necessary in order to the pardon of sin. They see in the death of Jesus a manifestation of divine love, but they see no recognition of the claims of divine justice.

There are some who hold that while sin disturbs the moral harmony of the universe, and while sinners are not exempt from blame, they will, if they die in their sins, be punished for a longer or shorter period, but will through the goodness of the universal Father be restored to fellowship with him, and exalted to the mansions of heavenly glory. There are those, too, who have such views of the paternal character of God as to preclude the belief that he will at all punish any of his creatures. They are Universalists in the most enlarged acceptation of the term. If I mistake not, there is a movement in modern religious thought in this direction. It is very decided among Unitarians; and what I will call *Beecherism* encourages it while men are to be found, here and there in all denominations, who are trying to believe that God's love for sinners will not suffer him to punish them for their sins. All this grows out of false views of the divine character—false views of the Fatherhood of God. It is supposed that he has so much regard for the happiness of his creatures, as to subordinate to its promotion the demands of his law, and the glory of his name. This is referred to by Dr. Hodge as “the greatest happiness theory.”

It is proper here to say, that the doctrine of the Fatherhood of God has been discussed at some length by two eminent Scotch Theologians, Drs. Candlish and Crawford. They are very earnest in the advocacy of their respective views. Dr. Crawford insists that God is Father in the general sense, and that all men may properly say, "Our Father who art in heaven." He admits, however, that there is a special sense in which God is the Father of those only who are regenerated and adopted by his grace. The position of Dr. Candlish is different. He understands the Fatherhood of God in its limited sense, and considers the doctrine of universal Fatherhood as utterly inadmissible. There are some other matters on which these able writers differ, but their most prominent difference has now been indicated.

With regard to the Fatherhood of God, I do not hesitate to adopt the spiritual view. That is to say, God is the Father of his people, not because he has created them, but because he has begotten them to a new life in Christ Jesus. They are "born of God," or rather begotten of him as analogy suggests, though we must re-

member that on such a subject analogy is of necessity defective. I do not deny that in a vague, general sense the terms Creator and Father may be used synonymously. They are so used in speech, in books, and specially in poetical literature, of the last of which we have a spécimen in Pope's "Universal Prayer." Indeed, I go farther and say, that Paul in his magnificent discourse in Athens by quoting the words of a Greek poet, "For we are also his offspring," virtually referred to the Creator as Father. I make every concession which truth and candor require me to make, and yet I say with strongest emphasis that the New Testament doctrine of the divine Fatherhood is the doctrine of spiritual regenerative paternity. According to the overwhelming testimony of the passages bearing on the subject, men are God's children, not because he has made them, but because he has regenerated them. It is highly important, too, that we "hold fast to the form of sound words," for otherwise we shall probably let go our hold on sound ideas. Who can tell what practical harm would result from the unchallenged use of the Fatherhood of God, in the enlarged

sense of the phrase? Let men believe that they are in any sense the children of God, and they will infer that they are heirs apparent to thrones of glory in heaven. Even the most wicked may "lay the flattering unction to their souls" that they are on their way to mansions in the skies. Oh! let us not use words so as to imperil the interests of immortal souls.

But it is time to inquire, What say the Scriptures? In John 1: 11, 12, 13, we read: "He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." These verses antagonize, as every one can see, with the universal Fatherhood of God. Christ's own—the Jews who were his in a national sense—did not receive him. His rejection by them was general though not universal. Some received him, and to them he gave power to become the sons of God. I suppose "power to become the sons of God," refers to the great privilege and honor of adoption. In the act of adoption is con-

ferred the appellation "sons of God." The adopted are called by a new name. Who are these adopted ones? Those who were born of God—regenerated. While adoption gives a new name, regeneration gives a new nature. The filial nature is given and the filial name follows. But observe how the filial birth is effected—not by blood, in the Greek, plural, *bloods*, denoting natural generation. There is no species of the many bloods into which the original "one blood" has degenerated, that has in it one particle of regenerating virtue. Natural generation never has made, and never will make a spiritual child of God. Nor does the birth referred to result from "the will of the flesh." It is not traceable to any desire inherent in corrupt human nature. Man's wretched depravity precludes and excludes the desire to be born again. Neither is the new birth effected by the will of man. The will of man may lead him to institute processes by which aliens may be received into families, and treated as children. The philosophy of civil adoption was understood by Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans. Those who become the sons of God are not born of the will

of man. How then are they born or begotten? "Of God," literally "out of God." The agency which gives "a new heart" is divine. Hence we have the phrase "born of the Spirit," and the beginning of divine life in the soul is likened to a creation and resurrection—two works which it would be preposterous to ascribe to any power inferior to God's.

Now, that man as man is not God's child (to refer to Robertson's language,) is manifest, because man as man is made the subject of regenerating grace. So far from being a child of God because divinely created, he needs regenerating grace for the very reason that he is not a child of God. Jesus therefore said to the Jews, the very Jews who rejected him, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do." This does not of course mean that the devil created them, but that in moral character they were like him. It is supremely worthy of remark that when Jesus used the words just quoted, he did so in response to what the Jews had said: "We have one Father, even God." They believed in the universal Fatherhood of God so far as their nation was concerned; but

Jesus said, "If God were your Father, ye would love me." God was their Creator, but he was not in the evangelical sense of the word their Father. He is in this sense the Father of those only who love Christ. Alas, these have been in a decided minority in all the centuries.

The view here presented is confirmed by many passages of the apostolic epistles. I refer to the following: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." Here we have discrimination, for we are referred to those who are led by the Spirit of God, which of course implies that there are others who are not thus led. This being the case, the passage teaches the special Fatherhood of God. Hence in the succeeding verse (Rom. 8: 15,) there is mention of "the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." Nor is this all: in verses 16, 17, it is said, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." It is obvious that the Spirit bears witness with Christians alone, for if he bears witness with all men that they are "the children of God," it follows irre-

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shine as lights in the world." No ingenu-
explain how "a crooked and perverse na-
is composed of "sons of God," when "th-
of God" are distinguished from it and shi-
lights in it. Things and persons that diff-
not be the same.

The language of 1 John 3: 1, deserv-
phatic notice: "Behold, what manner of
the Father hath bestowed upon us, th-
should be called the sons of God: Theref-
world knoweth us not, because it knew him
Spiritual adoption is here referred to.
adopted are called "the sons of God," a
act of adoption is so far from being indi-
nate, embracing all the world, that the w-
said not to know the adopted. The wor-
the "natural man," its representative,
not the things of the Spirit—does not
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It is surely superfluous to say that those w-
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pardon of sin has been denied on v
grounds. Some have said that God in
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can inspire repentance, and this agency

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hension. They suppose the necessity refutes the origination of love in the divine being. They properly deny that the atonement or anything else was necessary to excite the love of God. That love was in his heart from eternity, and the atonement results from it. There could have been no atonement without it. "He loved us, is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." The mission of his Son was the result of antecedent love. God loved us, and *therefore* he sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. But while the atonement was not necessary in the sense of originating the love of God to us, it was, for other reasons, indispensable to our salvation. We find a reason in the character of the divine law. This law, with its penalties annexed to its violation, is "holy, and just, and good." If so, holiness, justice, and goodness require an observance of its precepts, and in case of disobedience, the infliction of its penalties. Hence the necessity of an atonement clearly appears. The law having been transgressed, it strained the exercise of mercy in man's sal-

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which renders it deserving of punishment. I present the matter concretely rather than abstractly, I say that a sinner, because he is a sinner, deserves punishment. He is a rebel against the government of God, and justice requires that he shall pay the penalty of rebellion. Law and justice require that the transgressor shall be punished, on account of the ill-desert of sin; that is to say, on account of his personal blameworthiness. The philosophy of punishment is susceptible of no other explanation. There is something in the nature of sin which calls for penal infliction on the sinner, and from the nature of sin the necessity of atonement may be traced to the nature of God. It can be traced no farther. All reasoning on the subject is destined to culminate at this point, and here it exhibits its supreme strength. For if we ask what the law of God is what it is, the answer is because the nature of God is what it is. If we ask why sin is such an evil as to deserve punishment the answer is, because it is antagonistic to the nature of God. Here, therefore,—in the domain of nature,—is the field on which is to be decided the contest *for* or *against* the necessity of a

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God is something similar to exasperated passion in man. It is not. God's wrath is a holy just indignation against sin. We are not left to conjecture whether this wrath exists; for it is revealed from heaven. It comes on the children of disobedience—abides on unbelievers—and believers are saved from it through Jesus Christ. Wrath against sin and love for sinners are perfectly compatible. The feelings of every good man may be appealed to in proof of this fact, and the fact itself receives its highest exemplification in God. He so loved sinners, and so hated their sins, as to send his Son from heaven to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself," that he might gratify the impulses of his love in saving sinners. In the cross God shows himself to the universe as the sinner's friend, and the unpromising eternal enemy of sin.

Some think that it detracts from the perfection of the divine character to speak of the wrath of God. Their view of wrath is that it is a selfish, vindictive passion. Such a passion is, I think, and properly too, unworthy of God. But there is a vast difference between *vindictive* and *vindictive*; and while the wrath of God

not vindictive, it is vindicative of his justice, his law, his government. This is seen in the agony of Gethsemane, and in the tragedy of Calvary.

The text refers to "the adoption of sons," but it is evident that the adopted are justified. It would not comport with the majesty of the lawgiver, to receive as sons those resting under the condemnation of the law. The sentence of condemnation must be removed, guilt must be canceled, and the gracious act of justification must take place. There must be acceptance of Christ, the Beloved. The meritorious basis of all this is the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, gratuitously imputed and received by faith. This righteousness meets the demands of the law under which, the text says, Christ was made, and he is therefore "the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." It is plain, then, that the atonement of Christ sustains a vitally important relation to the great doctrine of justification; for it removes all legal obstructions out of the way of a sinner's reception into the divine favor. The act of justification is always accompanied by regeneration.

which removes the *moral* obstructions out of the way of salvation. This great change is the process of spiritual filiation, by which "children of the devil" are made "children of God." Inseparable from it is "the adoption of sons" resulting from Christ's mission; for the Father sent him "to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." It is to be remembered that Christ is in the highest sense of the words "the Son of God." Not only so, but this phrase as applied to him has a meaning supremely peculiar. Hence he is called "the only-begotten Son of God," and "the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father." While therefore it is true that Christ is in the most exalted acceptation of the language "the Son of God," and while God is in a sense inconceivably sublime his Father, it is also a blessed truth that believers in Christ, the regenerate, the adopted, are, in an inferior sense, sons of God, and God, in an inferior sense, is their Father. Union with Christ creates Brotherhood, and Brotherhood in Christ establishes Fatherhood in God. The Fatherhood is not through the first Adam, but through the second,



“partakers of the divine nature”—to show the intimate union with God into which believers are brought through Christ. Can we not now see great force and beauty in the words of Jesus in his intercessory prayer?—“That they all may be one ; as thou, Father, art in in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us.” “I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one.” Observe, Christ is in his brethren—“I in them ;” and the Father is in Christ—“thou in me.” Thus men are brought to God. It is through Christ. “No man come to the Father but by me,” is the language of Jesus. God is accessible through the mediation of Christ alone, and most prominent in his work of mediation is the atonement made by his obedience and death. Through this atonement are accomplished the purposes of predestination and love.

Hence it is written, “Having predestinated unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ, himself, according to the good pleasure of his will to the praise of the glory of his grace.” The divine programme was arranged before the foundation of the world. Even from eternity

the divine Intellect projected its thoughts into the distant future, contemplating the existence and the ruin of man, while the love of the divine Heart kept pace with the excursions of the intellect. Then was the purpose of God formed to reclaim out of Adam's fallen race, and to adopt as children his chosen ones, all who will finally be saved. The purpose was to do this in Christ, through Christ, and love was in blessed union with the purpose—the very love which reached its climax of manifestation, when Jesus poured forth his atoning blood on Calvary. Then it was that the voice of God, the Law-giver, and Guardian of the rights of the divine government, was heard saying, “Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts; smite the Shepherd and the sheep shall be scattered.” Then was the Shepherd smitten that the flock might go free. Then did Jesus not save himself that he might save others. The *smiting* referred to by Zechariah is identical with the *bruising* mentioned by Isaiah, and it pleased the Lord to bruise the Messiah. How much this smiting or bruising implied, we shall never know

We know, however, that it was judicially inflicted by the Lawgiver on Christ as the substitute for sinners. These two things were necessary to give to the sufferings of Jesus their atoning properties. He must suffer in the place of others—that is with a view to satisfy the law in their behalf; and the Lawgiver must approve the substitution, and inflict penal sufferings on the substitute. There are three epithets descriptive of all sufferings; namely, calamitous, disciplinary, and penal. Calamitous sufferings have no particular reference to sin; disciplinary sufferings are intended for the good of the sufferers; and penal sufferings are designed to satisfy law and justice. It was in the last sense that Jesus suffered. His sufferings were penal, because he endured the penalty of the law, and the law was so honored, so magnified, so glorified, by his atonement, that the Fatherhood of God, though of grace and not of works of law, is nevertheless consistent with law, harmonious with justice, illustrative of love, and radiant with holiness.

Thus have I very imperfectly developed my theme, first calling your attention to the Fatherhood of God, and secondly pointing out its

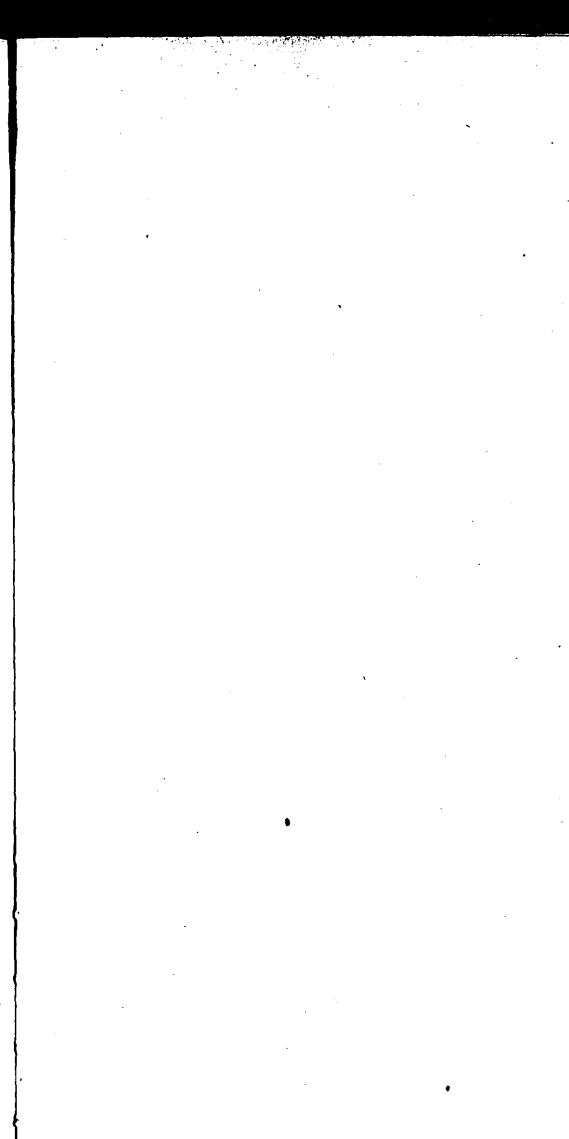


the blood of the cross, a relation not exemplified in holy angels, but in sinners saved by grace.

“Nearest the throne and first in song,
Man shall his hallelujahs raise.”

3. Christ crucified, through whom is effected the adoption of sons, should be the minister's theme. Away with all earth-born themes when the man of God speaks to perishing sinners. It would be an impertinence equally culpable and cruel, to dwell on topics not connected with Christ and salvation. What sinners need to know is how they may be saved—how they may secure the blessings of the Fatherhood of God. There is hope for them through Christ alone. His cross stands the exponent of divine love and compassion. The blood shed on that cross is as efficacious to-day as ever. It retains its original virtue, unimpaired by the lapse of ages and the mutations of all things earthly. Brethren of the ministry, let us preach Christ crucified, let us hold up the cross, the precious cross, and stand behind it always. Let us say with Paul, “God forbid that I should glory save in the cross





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